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Indigenous and Transnational Terrorism in Turkey

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OSAC NOTE: This Report was originally issued in October 2005. It is being updated slightly to reflect the continuing issue of Indigenous and Transnational Terror issues in Turkey.

Executive Summary

In the summer of 2005, Turkey witnessed several high-profile transnational and indigenous terrorist incidents and continuous low-level terrorist activity.



In August, The Turkish National Police (TNP) foiled an al-Qa'ida plot in its final stages of planning. The plot targeted Israeli cruise ships using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Turkey's port of Alanya.

The level of small-scale IED activity attributed to indigenous Kurdish terrorists was also a cause for concern.

There were at least 19 separate attacks targeting tourist, commercial and government interests from the end of

April to early September 2005, leaving Turkey at a high threat level for terrorism.

Even if not directly targeted in the past, U.S. citizens and businesses run the risk of suffering collateral damage from terrorists' erroneously detonated

IEDs, randomly planted garbage bombs or tourism-focused attacks in the future. This piece outlines last summer's attacks and threats posed by

transnational and indigenous terrorist groups in Turkey.

Elements of Transnational Terrorism

Recent al-Qa'ida Activity

Transnational terrorist cells remain active in Turkey. Responding to an August 2005 chemical fire in Mersin, Turkish authorities uncovered a possible al-Qa'ida-related plot to attack Israeli cruise ships in the port of Alanya. Mirroring the modus operandi of the 2000 attack on the U.S.S. Cole, the plot entailed using a 750-kilogram stockpile of chemicals and



explosives to produce a Zodiac boat-planted bomb. At the point the plot was discovered, surveillance, financing and explosive material procurement had all been completed. The terrorists were in the bomb composition phase of the attack.

The Turkish National Police (TNP) arrested numerous suspects, including the Syrian-born al-Qaida terrorist Luay al-Saka who was known to have ties to Abu-Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and the perpetrators of the November 2003 al-Qa'ida attacks in Istanbul. Luay al-Saka also received explosives training in an al-Qa'ida camp in Afghanistan and claimed to have ties with Osama bin Laden, the 9/11 terrorists and the July 7 London bombings. Although Turkey's heightened security posture can be credited for foiling this plot, Turkey remains vulnerable to transnational terrorist efforts.

Past al-Qaida Attacks and Plots

Among other recent transnational terrorist activity, the most notable example occurred in November 2003 when al-Qa'ida-affiliated terrorists orchestrated

four large-scale suicide bombings in Istanbul. Targeting western interests, massive suicide truck bombs killed 60 and wounded 740 at the British Consulate, HSBC Bank and two synagogues.

In May 2004, Turkish authorities foiled an Ansar al-Islam plot to attack the June 2004 NATO conference held in Istanbul. With links to al-Qa'ida, the sixteen arrested members of Ansar al-Islam were found with explosives, guns, bomb-making materials and an estimated 4,000 CDs containing Osama Bin Laden's training instructions.

Implications for Foreign Business

Similar to recent indigenous terrorist attacks, the most recently foiled al-Qa'ida plot also targeted the growing coastal tourist industry. Although the press sources report that the intended target was the port of Alanya on the southern coast, the bombs were reportedly being produced in Mersin. Known for its influx of western cruise ships, the thousands of religious tourists that visit Apostle Paul's birthplace each year and the Mersin Economic Free Trade Zone that does \$2 billion worth of trade annually, Mersin is an economically important city. Due to the quantity and quality of the explosives, the group's attack would have had a greater economic impact on Turkey's tourism industry than the continuous small-scale Kurdish militant attacks. With a high-profile target and the magnitude of its destruction both in life and in economic loss as major objectives, this attack had the potential to inflict considerable economic damage.

Consistent with al-Qa'ida's worldwide operations, and as indicated in the State Department's [Worldwide Caution Public Announcement](#), it is possible that a terror cell fostered by al-Qa'ida could strike again in Turkey without warning. As terrorist organizations and tactics evolve, increased personal and corporate security vigilance is essential to staying safe and protecting assets.

Elements of Indigenous Terrorism

Kurdish Terrorist Groups

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), designated a terrorist group by the United States and the European Union, is the name commonly used by the media when discussing Kurdish terrorism. In 1999, however, the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan crippled the organization and, as a result, they signed a ceasefire with the government of Turkey (GoT). In 2003, the PKK renamed itself the Kongra-Gel, and in June 2004, this successor organization terminated the ceasefire citing insufficient GoT efforts to expand Kurdish freedoms. Today, the Kongra-Gel asserts its "peaceful" intentions while continuing to conduct attacks in the name of "self-defense."



A second Kurdish terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks/Falcons (TAK), also executed numerous attacks last summer. TAK and Kongra-Gel's relationship is unclear. Some media sources believe TAK may be a splinter group of Kongra-Gel or its predecessor the PKK. Regardless, like Kongra-Gel, TAK seeks an expansion of rights for Kurds in Turkey, possibly including independence. TAK's goal is to undermine the GoT by ruining its nearly \$16 billion tourist industry. While not aiming to kill tourists, on May 1 the TAK issued a statement urging tourists to stay home or risk becoming collateral damage in their attacks against government financial resources. In addition to commercial and tourism targets, TAK also started to execute attacks in major urban areas.

Increased Kurdish Terrorism in Turkey

From April to September 2005 there were at least 19 separate terrorist incidents in Turkey.



On October 6, Kongra-Gel's six-week self-imposed ceasefire expired after it failed to earn Kongra-Gel a prominent spot on Turkey's EU accession agenda. Overall, this ceasefire had been ineffective at preventing Kurdish militant violence and, therefore, the significance of its termination on the number and magnitude of future attacks is uncertain. Targeting of government, commercial and tourism interests cannot be ruled out.

Date	Location	Target	Event Description
4-Oct	Istanbul	Commercial	Premature detonation of unfinished explosive below a shoe store, killing one and injuring seven
20-Sep	Hakkari	Government	Kongra-Gel militants kidnapped village chief
19-Sep	Istanbul	Unknown	Garbage can-planted IED detonates injuring one
19-Sep	Adana and Antalya	Tourists, Transportation	Bomb explodes on a bus traveling between the two cities killing two and injuring ten
18-Sep	Van	Government, Police	Kongra-Gel militants opened gunfire on local police station killing one and injuring three
5-Sep	Istanbul	Tourists, Government	Three Kongra-Gel militants arrested with 2.5 kg of A-4 explosives
1-Sep	Bursa	Unknown	Premature detonation of PCIED killing one
22-Aug	Macka	Government, Police	Gun battle erupts between police and three suspects, one Syrian suspect killed and two officers injured
15-Aug	Southeast Turkey	Government	Bomb explodes outside local administrator's residence, no injuries
12-Aug	Mersin	Government, Police	Premature VBIED explodes outside of a police station killing one of the perpetrators.
12-Aug	Antalya	Government	Two garbage can-planted bombs reported, no injuries
8-Aug	Zeytinburnu District, Istanbul	Unknown	Apartment explosion kills two and injuries four after an unidentified terrorist cell erroneously mixed bomb-producing
7-Aug	Istanbul, Ataturk Airport	Tourists	IED explodes in taxi at international arrival terminal
6-Aug	Mersin	Tourists, Maritime, Business	Turkish authorities foil an alleged al-Qaida plot to target Israeli cruise ships. Zodiac boat and a quantity of heavy explosives were seized
4-Aug	Pendick District , Istanbul	Unknown	Device explodes injuring 4 people
2-Aug	Antalya	Tourists, Government	Two explosions in trash cans in southern resort city. Four Turkish municipality workers injured in first explosion. Three Turkish civilians and one French tourist injured in the second explosion
23-Jul	Galata Bridge, Istanbul	Tourists	Small-scale device explodes injuring a Dutch citizen and a Turk
16-Jul	Kusadasi	Tourists, Transportation	Suspected female suicide bomber triggers blast on minibus kills 5 people, no claims of responsibility
11-Jul	Cesme	Tourists	Explosion in coastal resort injures 20 people, TAK claims
2-Jul	Bingol District, Istanbul	Government, Transportation	Bomb derails postal train near Suveren station, five railway workers killed injuring 15 people
1-Jul	Ankara	Government	Suicide bomber believed to be linked to DHKP/C shot and killed by TNP outside of government building
11-May	Bagcilar District,	Business	Device explodes outside a bank. No casualties

11-May	Bagcilar District, Istanbul	Business	Device explodes outside a bank. No casualties
30-Apr	Kusadasi	Government, Police	Device explodes, five TNP officers injured
27-Apr	Central Istanbul	Transportation	Two bombs with timers discovered – one attached to bridge, one in a bus station. No casualties

Modus Operandi

Although TAK claimed responsibility for only a limited number of attacks, it is thought to be responsible for several bombings that occurred in Turkey's Aegean and Mediterranean coastal resort areas last summer. Following TAK's May 1 warning, they claimed responsibility for a small IED explosion in the resort area of Cesme, which injured 20 people. Despite no claims of responsibility, the July 16 suicide bombing on a tourist mini-bus, the July 23 IED explosion near an Istanbul café, and the September 19 IED attack on a public bus driving between the resort cities of Adana and Antalya are also consistent with TAK's pattern of targeting tourism and the Turkish economy.



The second September 19 attack, where an IED was planted in a garbage can in Istanbul, is consistent with the TAK's recent willingness to expand its activity from outlying areas to major cities. The use of garbage cans to conceal IEDs in urban areas coincides with the modus operandi of the August 2 and 12 attacks as well. Although no group claimed responsibility, some press sources believe that this method is used by TAK to further their objective of creating a feeling of insecurity that deters tourism without causing a great number of casualties.

Kongra-Gel activity, on the other hand, often targeted the GoT directly . For example, the September 18 attack on a police station in Van and the September 20 kidnapping of a local police chief in Hakkari were both directed against local governments in traditional Kurdish militant territory.

Although Kongra-Gel does have IED capability and is willing to target tourists as its predecessor, PKK, did in the 1990s, the number of attacks Kongra-Gel perpetrated against commercial and tourist targets last summer remains unclear. Furthermore, with the end to its recently self-imposed ceasefire, the possibility of increased Kongra-Gel activity cannot be ruled out.

Other Indigenous Terrorist Networks

The DHKP/C, another indigenous terrorist network, is anti-U.S., anti-NATO, and anti-GoT in nature. Striving to create a Marxist Turkish state since 1978, the DHKP/C's traditional modus operandi is to attack official GoT targets with IEDs. It is believed that a suicide bomber connected with this group was killed by the TNP outside of a government building in Ankara on July 1.



According to press reports, the DHKP/C can be linked to the leftists responsible for four of the last six attacks on the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul. The TNP foiled DHKP/C's last plot to target the consulate with a rocket-propelled grenade in 1999. In May 2004, coinciding with the preparation for the June 2004 NATO conference, an IED linked with this network detonated prematurely on a municipal bus in the Fatih District of Istanbul. After a government raid in April 2004, DHKP/C's capabilities diminished slightly but the DHKP/C continues to pose a potential threat to soft targets in the region.

Government Response

The GoT reacted with a balanced approach of concessions and crackdowns. Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's public recognition of GoT shortcomings in addressing Kurdish concerns was the first by any Turkish leader and is an important first step in addressing militant Kurdish concerns. The degree to which the GoT makes a real commitment to implementing better Kurdish rights will most likely affect the frequency of Kongra-Gel- and TAK-related terrorist attacks in the near future.

Heightened TNP vigilance also led to some notable indigenous terrorist arrests. On September 5, the TNP arrested three Kongra-Gel militants in Istanbul and seized 2.5 kg of A-4 explosives. One of the captured militants is thought to be a responsible for an IED explosion that occurred in a taxi at the international arrival terminal of the Ataturk Airport in Istanbul on August 7.

As a result of the increased targeting of foreign interests and the prevalence of attacks on the coastline, the TNP also took decisive measures to increase port security. In addition to greater emphasis on camera surveillance of the ports' premise and surrounding area, government boats increasingly patrolled major harbors. Armed security personnel also guarded access control and mirrors are being used to search vehicles for IEDs. Similar security measures, including increased countersurveillance, were taken at resorts, government buildings and U.S. government facilities.

The GoT and the U.S. Government continue to cooperate on a wide range of anti-terrorism issues. The U.S. Government signed on to the NATO-sponsored Center for Excellent Defense Against Terrorism in Turkey. This center will serve an important role in the restructuring of the Turkish

intelligence community by transforming it into a more efficient and effective terrorism defense institution. The U.S. Government also continues to host upwards of twenty-five new Turkish national policemen every year to work towards their PHDs in terrorism prevention and criminal justice at various American universities.

Private Sector Response

Private sector organizations, particularly along the western coast of Turkey, made few changes to their physical and personal security status because they had been operating on a heightened state of alert since the November 2003 al-Qa'ida bombings. In response to the uncovered al-Qa'ida plot, Israel banned all Israeli cruise ships from the Port of Alanya for three weeks in August and Great Britain diverted all non-essential calls at ports between Ovacik and Izmir for 24 hours. Various American and British vessels refrained from docking for a short period.

Some corporations with limited VIP travel to the country increased guards on their private security details while others have advised their employees to practice heightened security vigilance.

Useful Links

[Istanbul, Turkey: 2006 Crime and Safety Report](#)

[Ankara, Turkey: 2006 Crime and Safety Report](#)

[Bureau of Consular Affairs, Consular Information Sheet](#)

[U.S. Embassy Ankara, Turkey](#)

[U.S. Consulate General Istanbul, Turkey](#)

[Worldwide Caution Public Announcement](#)

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Overseas Security Advisory Council • Bureau of Diplomatic Security

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Telephone: 571-345-2223 • Facsimile: 571-345-2238

[Contact OSAC Webmaster](#)